HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Alain Fournier (1886-1914)

To this old timer who spent childhood being told of the sufferings of World War I, it seems almost refreshing to step into the life of Alain Fournier, who, though killed as a soldier in the first years of WW 1, managed to turn that whole bloody mess into a kind of music. Let' s listen to the music Fournier conceives and presents; tt's the music of romance and of the sadness that the aroma of Romanticism always brings with it, that sadness embedded in all things that fade, but that carry the aroma of brilliance along with them. Fournier was a dreamer and poet, as well as a novelist
. It was Fournier's special genius to show off the dreads of war while palping the fascinating moments of the war situation. Thus he places himself, from the beginning, between two story tellers, a lad who is he, and himself. The novel opens onto the younger lad's admiration for the senior, three years older than he, and the ladder into the adventures of the story. The chief narrator is the younger lad, who feels great admiration for his senior, and wishes to emulate him. To do so he tracks the significant adventure of the other through the labyrinth of mystery. It is in the course of this tracking that the younger lad grows aware of the life changing visions that have transformed his friend. They are why the friend is truly great.

In dream wandering his friend has come on a magical ball; brilliant lights, flashing gowns, and indeed what will be the love of his life, a maiden nobler than all the world's sorrow. This set of apparitions is worth a lifetime to the emotionally susceptible older youth, and in fact the intertwining of individuals, around whom the events establish a haunting love story, is the semi complete evidence of the Romanticism which pervades this entire tale.

The hero of this spiritual adventure, le grand (great, heroic, large). Meaulnes, is as we know a youngster, under twenty, yet he becomes the prophet and visionary and the emblematic figure of his moment, Meaulnes rivals the mind work of the Colombian novelist Garcia Marquez. Our point, here, has to be that the Romantic can dominate any literary scene in which an outburst of con tenuous pain is woven into romantic passion.

In both Marquez' Cien Anos de Soledad and in Fournier's Meaulnes a scene of riveting beauty emerges out of and into the night. In Marquez' novel dream--magic, witchcraft, supreme beauty--emerges out of the night, casts its spell over the subsequent actions of the primary characters, and vanishes into its own history. The power of romance appears to captivate both of these texts. Is Romanticism, then, to be understood as an all pervasive element in literature? Can we find it among the Greeks and Romans? Of Course: consider the love poems of Sappho, the old men on the Skaian Gate in the Iliad, proclaiming before them the beauty of Helen, that the Trojan War, for all its destruction, was worthwhile, or that the pathos of Calypso in the Odyssey, forced to abandon her bpy-toy Odysseus, was worth the moral suffering. 0r in the mediaeval period? In the lyrics of Francois Villon? In Dante--take Pqolo and Francesca-- in the rough strong love lyrics of the Carmina Burana or the love music of the troubadours in Provence in the early modern period? Take the bevy of love sonnets that burst from Shakespeare, Jonson or Donne, with their faultless ears for the glory and fatality of love! In short, the inbursts of passion and magic, which we see in Fournier and Marquez for example, are traces of the intensity always latent in the longing to convert passion into inflammatory language.